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Viewing cable 07ANKARA480, TURKEY: GREEK MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN RIGHTS OF

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ANKARA480	2007-03-02 18:18	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: GREEK MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN RIGHTS OF
THRACE MUSLIMS FALL SHORT

REF: THESSALONIKI 16

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Turkey believes Greece's efforts to address the concerns of the ethnic Turkish minority population of

Western Thrace fall short. While noting that the GOG had made a start, MFA officials indicate they await final Greek action on the proposed legislation and other details before they can provide a comprehensive reaction. For Turkey, the package contains a few minor positives as well as proposals that are strongly opposed by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, none of which were (reportedly) adequately discussed with the community prior to its announcement. END SUMMARY

12. (C) MFA Department Head for Greece Ozlem Ergun told us that the GOT had not yet seen the actual package's draft legislation, but at first blush, the GOG initiative fell short of addressing some of the most serious complaints of Western Thrace's minority population. On key issues such as ethnic identity, religious rights, the administration of minority-run foundations, and administration of minority educational institutions, the Greek package not only falls short but is contrary to the wishes of the Turkish community in Thrace. She also reiterated the longstanding GOT position that Greek policy with regard to its Turkish ethnic minority community is not in compliance with the commitments expected of the Greek government under the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Lausanne Treaty.

DENIAL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

13. (C) Ergun noted that GOG authorities argue the Lausanne Treaty defines the minority as "Muslim" vice "Turkish," leading to Greece's policy prohibiting the use of the "Turkish" moniker. She argued that in "Greek" Qir heritage?"

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

14. (C) Ergun said the GOT was particularly concerned about the lack of religious rights for the Muslim minority in Greece. She pointed to the Greek Presidential Decree of December 24, 1990 as a continued impediment to Muslim religious freedom and noted that FM Bakoyannis' proposed changes only exacerbate the lack of independence for Islamic religious institutions in Greece. Ergun explained at great length the community's concerns about their inability to elect their religious leaders, or muftis, and the appointment of muftis by the government because of civil governance aspects of their positions. Western Thrace Muslims view GOG plans to hire 240 imams to assist in religious education as a further imposition of state-approved and state-selected religious workers, rather than a positive step to assist the community. From the GOT perspective, the imposition of leaders on the Muslim community is intolerable. Ergun asked rhetorically how Greek Orthodox adherents would like it if the GOT decided to appoint church leadership in Istanbul.

FOUNDATION ADMINISTRATION

15. (C) In line with the non-recognition of elected muftis by the GOG, the 1990 decree also denies the rights and duties of those elected muftis to supervise the properties of religious foundations. Ergun noted that the GOT's initial response commented favorably on the GOG's stated intent to cancel back taxes and liens on foundation properties, and expressed the hope that the administration of religious foundations will soon revert to the system that existed until 1967. Until then, foundation board members were elected from among members of the community rather than appointed by the government, as is currently the case.

EDUCATION

16. (C) According to Ergun, education remains a crucial area, and the GOT eagerly awaits specific details regarding GOG plans to improve the educational opportunities for ethnic Turkish students. She pointed to lower educational standards for minority schools in Western Thrace, citing the differing

laws on compulsory education in Greece; majority community children are compelled to attend a minimum of nine years while minority community children must only attend for six. She also referred to the inadequate number of schools for the size of the population, noting there are only two Turkish language high schools in the entire region. In Komotini, where the Turkish minority constitutes half of the population, there are 25 state high schools and just the one Turkish language school. In Xanthi, the ratio is 37 to one.

17. (C) While it's a positive step that the GOG has established a quota for civil service positions, Ergun pointed out that ethnic Turkish students had already had a similar quota for university admissions but had not been successful due to the lower educational standards and inadequate facilities for ethnic minority primary and secondary students.

CITIZENSHIP LOSS

18. (C) While accepting as a positive the restitution of Greek citizenship to about 60 stateless individuals, Ergun said the step pales in comparison to the magnitude of the problem, which she described as constituting upwards of 60,000 victims who were stripped of their Greek, and thus EU, citizenship.

LACK OF CONSULTATION

19. (C) Perhaps most troubling for the GOT, according to Ergun, was the GOG's lack of consultation with members of minority ethnic Turkish groups in constructing the Bakoyannis package. Ergun cited statements by the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Consultative Board, the Western Thrace Mosques Religious Officials Association, and the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Sermon and Guidance Committee, to argue that the GOG had not adequately consulted the Muslim community. She noted that while these groups and others were pleased that the GOG was taking steps -- and found some aspects of the GOG proposal positive -- some fundamental issues remain unaddressed or even constitute a step backward.

110. (C) COMMENT: There has been very little public discussion of the GOG proposals to date in Turkey. Some observers note cynically that the GOG package is merely an attempt by the ruling party in Greece to ingratiate itself with the minority community before elections. Once the details of FM Bakoyannis' plan become more clear, the GOT may be able to move beyond the disappointing initial reaction of "nice, but not nearly enough."

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